

Hernán Cortés arrived at the area of Veracruz in 1519 and was told by the coastal tribes that they could find gold and riches farther inland, in *Mejico*, their name for Tenochtitlan. As Cortés headed towards the center of the Aztec Empire, the Aztec leader, *Montezuma*, heard stories of a great white man with a beard coming from the east. He believed the legends of Quetzalcóatl's return in the year promised. Montezuma assumed Cortés to be the Aztec God and Cortés let him believe it. By the time the Aztec people realized that the Spaniards were only invaders, not gods, it was too late. Cortés made allies of all the tribes the Aztec had conquered and used them in a massive attack on Tenochtitlan that destroyed the city. It only took 2 years to completely destroy one of the greatest civilizations of ancient Mexico.

Under Spanish rule, Mexico became the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The Spaniards built Mexico City over the top of the great Aztec center, using stones from the original pyramids to construct their buildings and destroying much of the stone work that had adorned the pyramids. The Colonial Period lasted until Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821. The descendants of the great Aztec and Maya Empires lived under the system of *encomiendas* which essentially made them slaves to the Spanish owners of the land. They were forced to work the land and accept a new religion. Curiously, most Indians willingly converted to the Catholic religion that was forced upon them by the landowners. A big reason for this is the miracle of Guadalupe. In 1531 an Indian by the name of Juan Diego claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary, but she had dark skin, like his own. The story goes that he brought roses from the Virgin to the Bishop in his cloak.

When he stood in front of the Bishop and dropped the roses from the cloth, the portrait of a dark-skinned Mary had appeared on it. The event was recognized as a miracle by the Catholic Church and the cloak is still on display in the new Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Mexico's independence was fought for without any real leadership or direction and won without a plan for the future. Political strife, anarchy and war marked most of the 1800's in Mexico. This period brought war with the United States in 1846 and the loss of what is now Texas, followed in 1848 by the cession of lands included in the present day states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Texas and California. In the 1860's, France set up its one and only throne in Mexico. Even though his troops lost the Battle of Puebla against the Mexican army on May 5, 1862, Napoleon III sent more soldiers in a year later. This forced President *Benito Juárez* to flee to the U.S. and Napoleon set up the royal Hapsburgs, *Maximilian* and *Carlota*, as emperor and empress of Mexico. They ruled for three years, but were overthrown by

Benito Juárez and loyal Mexican soldiers in 1867. Maximilian went before a firing squad and Carlota, having returned to Europe before hand, spent the rest of her life in a mental institution.

In the late 1800's, dictator *Porfirio Díaz* brought a long period of stability to Mexico with development by foreign interests. The Revolution of 1910 signaled the beginning of a period of dramatic social change that led to the creation of the Constitution of 1917. Modeled after the United States Constitution, it remains in force today. There were periods of land reform in the 1930's and industry improved steadily through the 1980's, but a severe world recession in the 80's and the devaluation of the peso in 1993 have severely slowed growth of the economy.